

of the ancient Lake Moeris,<sup>1</sup> which covered at least a large part of the floor of the Fayûm depression. Lake Moeris was first described about 450 B.C. by Herodotus, who believed it to be an artificial basin constructed by one of the Pharaohs of the XIIth dynasty for the regulation of the water-supply of Lower Egypt. Its existence and position have been much discussed in modern times, but it is now believed that the Fayûm depression is a natural one, and King Amenemhat III., of the XIIth dynasty, is accredited with the formation of the lake about 2500 B.C., through the widening and deepening of the small canal already existing between the Nile and the depression, and placing it under artificial control. According to Major R. Hanbury Brown, Inspector-General of Irrigation for Upper Egypt, Lake Moeris covered the whole of the Fayûm up to the contour-line of 22.50 metres (74 feet) above mean sea-level,<sup>2</sup> and the greatest depth when the lake was at its full height would be about 70 metres (230 feet). At some time or other, either by a gradual or sudden process, the lake ceased to perform its offices of regulator and reservoir, and having once reached that stage, there would be nothing to prevent measures being taken to exclude most of the water from the depression except what would be required for the irrigation of reclaimed areas, and evaporation gradually reduced the area of the lake until it reached the present dimensions of the modern Birket Qarun. Much discussion has taken place within recent years with regard to the project of restoring this great storage reservoir. To enlarge the Bahr Yusef and flood the Fayûm involves the loss of many thousand acres of rich land; hence Captain Whitehouse proposed to utilise another depression, the Wady Ryan, lying to the south and south-west.<sup>3</sup>

The Birket Qarun lies approximately 140 feet below sea-level, and has an area of about 87 square miles, being 25 miles long and 5 or 6 miles in maximum breadth; the maximum depth is about 25 feet. The water of the present lake is sufficiently brackish to be quite unpalatable, though it is quite good enough for most culinary

<sup>1</sup> Apostolidis (*Bull. Soc. Khédiviale de Géogr.*, ser. vii., 1908, pp. 109 *et seq.*) maintains that this is a mistake made originally by Herodotus, and contrary to the testimony of monuments, traditions, etc. He says Regnant's analysis shows that the water is too salt to serve for agricultural purposes, and that there is no reason to suppose that in antiquity things were different. The principal canal of the Fayûm was made of such a depth that the waters of the Nile might freely enter the province even in low flood, and subsequently a lake was made at the entrance to the Fayûm to act as a reservoir for the superfluous waters at periods of high flood, for purposes of agriculture.

<sup>2</sup> *The Fayûm and Lake Moeris*, p. 78, London, 1892.

<sup>3</sup> See William Willcocks, *The Assuân Reservoir and Lake Moeris*, lecture delivered before the Khedivial Geographical Society at Cairo, London, 1904.